**The embodiment of a people**

Shaka Zulu: The road to greatness

Shaka, as a small boy, was not a rich or a well respected person, rather he was a loner who only had the love of his mother. Fueled by his hatred of others, Shaka gave himself high expectations for becoming something greater in life. Later in his thirties, shaped by his past experiences, Shaka became a tough, courageous, and cruel leader. His dream came to fruition after he transformed a small Zulu village into a grand African empire that stood up against the mighty British. Shaka ,with his grand army, became an iconic figure that shook South Africa to it’s very core.

Shaka was born in 1787 to **Nandi**, a daughter of the previous chief of eLangeni tribe. His father, **Senzangakona**, was a chief of a small tribe called the Zulu. Shaka’s parents relationship quickly deteriorate after his birth, which is why he lived solely with his mother. Nandi wasn’t welcomed back at her tribe so she and Shaka lived among the Zulu’s, who tolerated her but at the same time treated her with disrespect. Shaka throughout his childhood was teased and bullied which caused him to grow up very bitter and angry. Nandi tried to help her son maintain composure by reminding him that he was of royal descent on both sides of his family.



In his twenties, Shaka became a warrior or **impi** under the local chieftain [**Dingiswayo**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dingiswayo) of the [Mthethwa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mthethwa). Dingiswayo had just recently conquered the Zulu, who enlisted their own troops to pay tribute. For the next six years, Shaka fought on Dingiswayo behalf, developing the reputation as an outstanding and ruthless soldier. Dingiswayo saw Shaka’s potential as a leader and decided to prepare him to be the future chief of the Zulus. Dingiswayo planned on using the Zulus as a buffer zone between them and the **Ndwandwe**, a powerful clan that rivaled the Mthethwa. Shaka rose through the ranks of the Mthethwa army eventually becoming the commander. Shaka was a careful strategist that developed several new tactics that put his armies ahead of the curb. Shaka created the **iklwa**, a short stabbing spear with a long tip used in close combat. Shaka also trained his soldiers to fight without shoes which allowed them greater mobility. Now that his soldiers were agile and close range fighters, Shaka developed a formation around his new found tactics called "Buffalo horns". “**Buffalo horns**” was used primarily to surround and engulf the enemy. 

After the death of his father, Shaka ascended to the throne of the Zulus. This was short lived however for soon Dingiswayo was murdered by [**Zwide**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zwide), a chief of the Ndwandwe clan. Shaka, with his superior tactics, defeated Zwide in numerous battles and became undoubtedly the most powerful ruler in all the region. After Shaka allied himself with local clans, he felt ready to challenge the leaderless Mthethwa. After a few decisive battles, Shaka was victorious and became the supreme ruler over this vast domain in South Africa. However, Soon madness engulfed Shaka after his mother died. While grieving for his loss, he executed 7000 men and women to ease his pain. Through all this political turmoil, Shaka’s two half [brothers](http://www.essortment.com/all/whoisshakazul_rrgj.htm) plotted against him. In 1828, his brothers carried out their plot and dumped his body in a unmarked grave. One of the half brothers, **Dingaan**, immediately claimed kingship afterwards.

Shaka did the impossible. He transformed a small village into an African superpower. He did so in spite of numerous setbacks throughout his life. Shaka is now looked at as the embodiment of the Zulu people. He will forever keep this honor not because of his injustices but for his genius, charisma, and hard working nature, qualities in which separated him from the herd.

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